THE DISTRIBUTION MAPS OF THE BRITISH MICRO—LEPIDOPTERA: A SERVICE FOR LEPIDOPTERISTS

A.M. EMMET

Labrey Cottage, Victoria Gardens, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3AF.

IN *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* the distribution of the Microlepidoptera is shown by maps constructed on a vice-county basis. Apart from a very few that are extinct or lack claim to their place on the British list, every species has its map. There are about 1500 species of Microlepidoptera in Britain and maps for the first 400 have already been published in Volumes 1 and 2. However, these printed maps, especially those in Volume 1, are now out of date; many species have twice the number of vice-county records and some more than three times. As an example, the map in MBGBI 1 for *Stigmella atricapitella* (Haworth) shows 29 vice-county records; now there are 92. These additional records have been plotted on a set of manuscript maps.

For the remaining 1100 species, distribution maps are already in existence for all families except the Pterophoridae, and their maps should be available before this article is printed. Most authors for MBGBI make the preparation of the maps their first task, since they learn much about each species in the process. They conduct a thorough search of the literature and often come upon valuable information concerning behaviour or the early stages. They scan collections, especially those held by museums, frequently encountering interesting misidentifications. They badger their fellow entomologsts for their records, often a very profitable enterprise. For two consecutive years I showed the distribution maps for the Coleophoridae at the Annual Exhibition of the British Entomological & Natural History Society and this resulted in my receiving over 700 new vice-county records for the family, many of them for the common species entomologists seldom bother to include in their lists. As an example of the coverage, *Coleophora serratella* (Linnaeus) is now recorded from every vice-county in mainland Great Britain except v.c.109; Irish records, however, are still very sparse.

The maps are there but it will be many years before all of them are published.

Readers get impatient at the slow rate at which the volumes of MBGBI appear. They should remember that it took Haworth 25 years to produce the four volumes of *Lepidoptera Britannica* and it took Ochsenheimer and Treitschke 29 years for *Die Schmetterlinge von Europa;* moreover, in the early 19th century there was less to be said about each species. There is so much demand for the information given on the maps that it seems desirable to make it accessible before publication. This has been made possible by having all the maps duplicated. The master copy remains with the MBGBI author and the duplicate is lodged with me as editor. An added advantage is that new entries can now be made on either map. Many collectors send

me their records and in the case of the less diligent authors my own entries far exceed theirs. I write the data for each entry on the back of the map and at intervals the authors and I can scan each other's maps and bring them up to date.

An entomologist requiring information has only to write to me. Currently or in the recent past compilers of lists for 17 counties have been in touch with me to the mutual benefit of both parties. One county still in the early stages of preparation sent me their computerised list comprising 416 species of Microlepidoptera; to these I was able to add another 469 species and in return I received from them 158 new records for their two vice-counties. In the case of another county, too, I was able to double their total. The maps also show which species on their list are outside their normal range. Such records are not necessarily based on mis-identification, but the probability is that that is the case; if the specimen is extant it can be re-examined and if necessary dissected. Some records, like those of *Agonopterix cnicella* (Treitschke) and *Epischnia bankesiella* Richardson from an inland county in eastern England, can be summarily dismissed. Many county recorders have a limited knowledge of entomological history and when, for example, they encounter a record for a species that has changed its name like *Crambus pratella,* it is all too easy for them to assign it wrongly. This is another area where I can help.

The individual collector can also make use of the service I can offer. If he has taken a rare species, he can check with me whether it is a new county record and if he wants the full distribution for a paper he is preparing, he has only to ask. Recently in one of the journals, I read "New to Scotland"; my maps show two prior unpublished Scottish records.

The MBGBI maps are not a substitute for county lists. They give only a single voucher record for each vice-county, or occasionally a second where an early record has been updated. The data accompanying the record is often of value in drawing attention to a useful source or in giving the name of a collector who has worked the area and may have other information to offer. I should point out that for many families I have only the information on the face of the map and if an inquirer needs the source of a record I have to instruct him to write to the relevant MBGBI author. Inevitably, the source of some of the records has been lost.

My motive in establishing the service the duplicate maps make possible is to elicit more records from *you.* The more comprehensive the maps are, the greater their value. I have already pointed out the importance of recording common species as well as those that are rare. In the past, macro-lepidopterists used to send their records to the Biological Records Centre at Monks Wood; if microlepidopterists send their records to me, as some do already, our knowledge of distribution will be quickly extended. The two least-well recorded counties in England are Northamptonshire (v.c.32) and Leicestershire (v.c.55); do you have records of either of them?